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ABSTRACT

The concept of transition of an individual with a disability from school to adult environments is presented from the perspective of the educator's role. The educator's role is perceived as: (1) an "expert" on the needs of individuals with mental disabilities and the barriers they face when they move from the educational environment to the adult environment, and (2) an active member of a team facilitating movement of students. As students end their school programming, they and their parents find a confusing and often duplicative array of services, which in some cases meet none of the individual student's needs. Effective transition programming calls for broad levels of cooperation, which can be achieved through joint agreements, development of models of service delivery, legislative mandates, and state transition initiatives. The Iowa Transition Initiative serves as an example of such cooperative programs. Additional components of transition that impact on educators more directly include curriculum, adult services, parent involvement, cooperative efforts guided by the joint agreements, and provision of information about available adult services. (JDD)

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Chapter Six

Transition

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OVERVIEW

How would you react if you were told, that as a teacher of students with mental disabilities, you alone were responsible for the preparation, facilitation and appropriate placement of your student into competitive employment? Impossible? Yes!

What would your reaction be if you were told to create a model of full services for your students that would span the school to adult environment or if you were instructed to create written agreements for services with Vocational Rehabilitation Services when none had existed in the past? What if you were told you needed to create a directory of all adult options available to an individual within your region upon graduation? Easy tasks? No!

For many educators, information on the concept of transition is not new. Unfortunately, due to the complexity of the topic, much of the information has been misunderstood. In many cases its perceived meaning has come across as unrealistic demands.

A normal reaction to unrealistic requests may be to simply put them aside. You have functioned adequately in the past. You have had some success as reflected in the outcomes of your students. Things are really not as bad as other people would make them out to be.

Sadly enough, if the national and state statistics are to be believed, there is a problem. It is becoming increasingly apparent that our students are not prepared for the adult environment that they are about to enter. In addition, those students enter environments that do not have the services needed to further develop skills or the support networks that would assure later success.

The recognition of those problems is the foundation of the concept of transition. A closer examination of this concept will show that although transition is complex and far reaching, it is realistic and achievable if everyone does their part.

What is important to keep in mind in exploring the concept of transition is it calls into play two roles for educators. The first role is that of an "expert:" The expert on the needs of those individuals with a mental disability and the barriers they face when they move from the educational environment to the adult environment, the expert on the unmet needs of the students, and the expert on what linkages, services, or state interagency agreements might be needed to support those students in the transition process. Through that role, needed information is provided to others so that they can provide the leadership and support required to facilitate efforts to transition specific students.

An expert's role is not a passive one. It requires the ability to articulate those needs and barriers in such a way that they are understood by those individuals who will be working on state, regional, and local components of the transition initiative. It requires seeking out, identifying, and communicating with those individuals involved in the formulation of transition planning.

The second role in transition for educators is as a active member of an expanded team. That team will need to focus on a given student and assess their needs for the remaining school years and beyond. In that role, an educator needs a strong knowledge of the community which the students will be entering and needs to be able to involve individuals from the community in the team and in the planning process for students. In this role, an educator is one of many players who will be looking at the facilitation of movement for the student from one environment to another.

The Concept of Transition

With these considerations in mind, let us take a closer look at the concept of transition. A dictionary definition of the word transition would bring in the concept of movement, more specifically "the process of changing from one form, state, activity, or place to another." Under that definition, it is clear that everyone experiences multiple transitions. It may be a change in job, or it may have been uncertainty as one left home and proceeded to college or work. Transitions are natural occurences that encompass many stages of every individual's life.

The transition discussed here, however, is focused on what the data have shown to be one of the most problematic transitions for everyone. That transition is the movement from the school environment to adult life. This transition also focuses on the individual with a disability as they make that movement.

For an individual with a disability, the movement from education to adult situations becomes more complex and, therefore, more problematic. Perceptions and misperceptions of disability, the existence of multiple services in a seemingly disorganized array, along with a lack of knowledge of how to ascertain or access needed services, compounds this otherwise difficult move.

Through Public Law 94-142 great strides have been made in education for all individuals with a disability. The public schools have offered these students a single point of entry into educational services, regardless of where they reside or where they might move. All special education students are provided a team of individuals to concentrate their thoughts and energies on that one student. As a result of that team effort, an Individual Education Plan is developed which commits to writing those programs and activities, projected to lead to further development and refinement of skills. Lastly, also offered are supportive services, including as appropriate, therapies, specialized equipment to help facilitate access to education opportunities and even transportation. All of those benefits listed above are to be offered within an environment that should be as close as possible to those educational environments offered to other non-disabled individuals.

As a student, his or her parents, and the teacher begin to look toward the end of school programming, they see none of the advantages mandated through Public Law 94-142 available in the adult community. Instead they find a confusing and often duplicative array of services. Those services, in some cases, meet none of the individual students needs. There is, in most cases, no single service entry point and rather, seemingly endless searching. The individual (when services are secured) may wind up with multiple plans. Each of those plans may encompass only parts of the identified needs and may lack any concrete offering of needed support.

Exploring the significant differences between the offerings of the educational environment and the adult environment, it is instructive to look at the statistics that report on the outcome of our educational process. An implied outcome of education is preparation for an optimal adjustment within our society including employment and other life activities. Yet we see that between 50 and 80% of individuals with a disability, of working age, are unemployed or underemployed (Will, 1984). We have also had the opportunity to look at individuals with disabilities who have left education programs through recent state longitudinal follow-up studies. Two such studies (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi & Fanning, 1985) generally reinforce those high unemployment figures and speak of other negative adjustments of the individuals to their community.

These disappointing outcomes, linked with national projections of 250,000 - 300,000 students leaving special education on a yearly basis, led the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) to issue a position paper on the topic of transitioning (Will, 1984). This position paper heralded a national transition initiative, reinforced by millions of dollars, to provide demonstration projects in the area of transitional services.

The OSERS initiative (Will, 1984) describe transition as "a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life" (p. 1). Within this context, it talks of the need for secure foundations at both ends of the bridge in addition to a solid span. This analogy points out the need for appropriate school preparation (one end of the bridge), support available upon exiting school (the span of the bridge), and opportunities and services available as appropriate in the adult community (the other end of the span) to provide a smooth transition.

Through the OSERS definition we can appreciate that the concept of transition is indeed complex and encompasses many environments and services, as well as individual actors. Also, from this definition we can appreciate that a discussion of transition leads to talk of such concepts as joint agreements, development of models of service delivery, legislative mandates, and state level initiatives. It is those concepts that seem so far removed from the classroom. How am I as an individual teacher going to impact on legislation, state initiatives and service delivery models? At this point the concept of transition appears to elicit unrealistic demands. Yet, we must recognize that part of the transition movement has to include joint agreements, model building, and so forth.

Chances are you will not be directly involved in these activities. But, even without direct involvement you should still have a knowledge of what is happening and you must make the effort to input your needs and the needs of your students into those activities.

This is where your role becomes one of an expert. Even if you are not directly part of building a transition model for Iowa, or in working out agreements between state agencies, these activities must reflect your needs. You will need to understand what is being done and whether the potential outcomes of these efforts will facilitate your personal transition activities.

The following sections will give you a brief overview of joint agreements, model development, legislation, and state initiatives. Please keep in mind as you review these sections that while your involvement may be indirect, they are important to your personal activities in the area of transition.

Joint Agreements

A joint agreement commits to writing specific actions that will occur in the transition process between the parties entering into the agreement. In this way we can begin to specify, in writing, who will do specific activities and for whom. To reinforce cooperation and communication, joint agreements between state agencies, schools, and adult providers will have to be secured. As soon as the education sector recognizes that it cannot provide all of the services needed by an individual with a disability to make an optimal adjustment within the adult community, the recognition that it must look to other agencies and services becomes apparent. Interagency cooperation, formalized through joint agreements, prepares education to deliver specified services. That preparation can then be completed with the knowledge that those services will be reinforced or continued within the next environment. This process should also look toward the establishment of the required ongoing support, support that would help an individual after the school years as they mature within the adult environment. This type of ongoing support, developed through joint agreements, is mandatory if we are no longer satisfied with individuals entering an environment of no services, duplicate services, or incomplete services. Just as we recognize that no single educator, individually, can do all things for a given student, we must also recognize that no one single program or service can do it all.

In spite of this apparent need for written agreements, it would appear that the existence of formal written agreements as a part of transition are minimal (Benz & Halpern, 1987). To maximize transition opportunities, additional interagency cooperation, reflected through written joint agreements, must be achieved.

Interagency cooperation, with resulting agreements, can provide the following outcomes, if applied properly:

1. It can prevent needless duplication of service.
2. It can provide a coordinated system of services to meet local needs.
3. It can provide continuity between services that are related or dependent on one another.
4. It can help save already scarce resources.
5. It can identify gaps in the system.
6. It can introduce a consistency of approach among services.
7. It can provide a reliable mechanism for sharing information. (Kelker, et al, 1986).

All of these potential outcomes are needed to achieve a smooth transition for students.

Model Development

Inherent in a complex concept such as transition is the need for systematic, replicable approaches that display movement of an individual from the school environment to an adult environment. In order to do this, the development of a model of transition must be put forward. This model should help create, replicate, and disseminate approaches to transition. With few exceptions, each state that has developed a transition initiative has had a model to lead the way. These models outline agencies and individuals involved in the process, curriculum and services, approaches, and evaluation. The state of Iowa is in the process of developing such a model through the Iowa Transition Initiative. Most likely this model for Iowa will draw upon successful approaches to transition as reflected in Iowa and other states.

The model that the Transition Planning Initiative will develop needs to encompass far more than the specific delivery of services. That model must also look at theories of organizational change and inter-organizational behavior (Johnson, Bruininks, & Thurlow, 1987). Consideration has to be given to constructive changes to systems to further transition activities. It must facilitate ways that agencies, services, organizations, and individuals can better communicate.

Legislation

Interagency cooperation (even more formalized approaches including joint agreements and philosophical approaches to services through models) sometimes requires the force of legislation to become fully implemented. Although there has been recent transition legislation in the states of Massachusets, New York, and Pennsylvania, only a few states have responded to the transition initiative through legislation (NASDSE, 1986).

In 1986 the Northeast Regional Resource Center summarized a survey of 18 states in their Guide to the Efforts of Selected Education Agencies to Improve Transition Services (Will, 1986). According to that study, of the 18 reporting states only three states had transition legislation in place and one additional state indicated transition legislation was pending.

Legislation may reflect an inability to provide transition via other avenues (e.g., agreements, interagency boards, etc.). In other cases, legislation may be viewed as reinforcing and guaranteeing continuation of other approaches. For whatever reason, legislation, although not frequently utilized, remains an option for implementation of transition strategies.

State Transition Initiative

The preliminary work on joint agreements, model development and legislation many times starts at a state level. In Iowa, state transition initiatives have been formally discussed since January of 1985. First through an Iowa Transition Advisory Board and now through the Iowa Transition Initiative, state agencies, organizations, and programs have come together to explore avenues and approaches to transition.

The success of the current Transition Initiative is critical for you as an educator. The forthcoming model from the Initiative should provide direction for

transition activities. In doing so, the model must support your individual efforts and the movement of your students through the transition phase.

The Transition Initiative hopes to elicit as much input and guidance as possible. In that way, a workable model for transition should result that will help eliminate identified problems and barriers. This model will only be useful for you if it reflects the remediation of those barriers you have identified.

In order to achieve the goal of a workable model, you must exercise your role as an expert. Through the co-chairs of the Transition Initiative and your representatives on the Planning Group your needs and the needs of your students must be heard. In some cases those needs may be unique to your particular geographic area, resource base, or classroom. In many other cases those needs probably reflect more general statewide needs. In any event, those needs will not be addressed unless they are heard.

To have an impact on this Initiative, your expertise must be used to identify and articulate problems and barriers faced by your students. Having identified problems and barriers you will need to seek out those voices that can best articulate those needs.

In considering some of the broad issues that Iowa's Transition Initiative may look at, it is apparent that the primary role of teachers in that initiative will probably be as experts providing information. You may welcome that role as you see the work that still needs to be done, at the state and regional levels, to effect transition. Remember that your role is important. Information on needs is critical to the success of the Transition Initiative. Even if you are satisfied with the transition opportunities available in your area, this is usable information. It can tell us about what is available in your area that is meeting the needs of your students. We must remember that we do have examples of exemplary transition projects in Iowa (Sitlington, 1987). These tend, however, to be "islands of excellence." The outcome of our transition efforts and state transition initiatives has to be the provision of consistent transition opportunities equally accessible throughout our state.

BEST PRACTICES

Looking at transition in the previous section as movement (change from one activity or place to another) or as a bridge between school and adult environments is helpful in understanding the concept only in its broadest sense. Faced with that problem the Iowa Transition Advisory Board through its multi-agency representatives set out to re-define transition in a way that would express the activities required. The culmination of that three month activity was a definition of transition as follows:

> A cooperative planning process for a student with a disability to establish and implement a series of programs and services leading to his or her post-school employment. This process should include the student, advocates, educators, youth and adult service providers, and employees.

This definition stresses the cooperative planning between environments in order to establish needed programs and services. It also sets the stage for the expanded

team (student, advocates, educators, youth and adult service providers, and employers) needed to provide input to the transition planning process.

Having reviewed the concept of transition and some components of that concept we move on to the educators role as a leader of an expanded team. The previous section of this paper set up components of transition that deal with some of the broader levels of cooperation, namely joint agreements, development of service delivery models, legislation, and state transition initiatives. Those broader components can form the foundation on which to build. While those efforts are indeed important, Brolin (1985) reminds us:

> "...[transition] is not only a matter of just devising a set of interagency agreements and a cooperative spirit. While these are an important first step, little further progress will be made unless we address the total scope and sequence needed for successful career development to occur." (p. 25)

The following are some of the additional components of transition that are commonly addressed. These are components that will impact on educators more directly. In addition they are components that usually have to be defined given the unique characteristics of the local environment.

Curriculum

There is no way that one or even a dozen approaches to the needs of particular students can be recommended within this section. The two volumes of Best Practices in Mental Disabilities are an excellent resource for curriculum ideas that, modified for individual needs, could be applied to facilitate transition. There are some common themes in the information in those two volumes that, applied to the concept of transition, would say curriculum should:

1. reflect activities that will result in functional skills required for specific activities within the adult environment;

2. reflect one's personal awareness of the options available within the community appropriate for your students;

3. reflect the involvement of parents, appropriate adult service providers, and others in the planning process;

4. be guided by long term (transition) goals which look at the maximum functioning of the individual within the adult environment; and,

5. be guided by appropriate assessment.

Adult Services

In the best of worlds, leaving school would signal an individual's ability to meet the variety of demands of the next environment. In reality, "aging-out" sets up an arbitrary age to determine when an individual leaves school. We can assume that, in many cases, an individual leaving special education will require additional services to fully provide assimilation within the adult environment. This assumption, implied in most transition definitions, reinforces the recognition that school preparation alone is not enough for full assimilation into adult environments.

There is a need for time limited services including further academic preparation, technical or trade preparation, and other services that could be offered through our community college network. There are specialized training and placement programming that might be required. The existence of supported employment options might be beneficial. Many of these services, if made available, could be accessed through the Job Training Partnership Act and Vocational Rehabilitation Services referral. Unfortunately, in too many cases, the appropriate program is not available locally. Also, in too many cases, linkages with Job Training Partnership Act and Vocational Rehabilitation Services are not accomplished prior to the student leaving the school environment.

One key to successful transition opportunities might be an increased existence of, and accessibility to, a range of adult services. Yet, in a survey completed by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (1986), over 80% of the state directors responding indicated a severe problem with people exiting school programs needing further adult training, treatment or supported work programs and the limited capacity of adult service systems to meet those needs. It is apparent that, as school programs further advance to meet the transition needs of their students, adult services must also recognize the role that they play in transition. Yet, transition studies and other related literature reveals again and again that communication and cooperation between school programs and adult services has been lacking (Hasazi et al, 1985; Wehman, Kreger & Seyforth, 1985).

We need to begin identifying and developing alternatives in the adult community that will reinforce and build on those skills acquired in school programming. We can no longer afford, within education, to work in isolation. We can no longer allow an individual to exit school programming, only to recognize that no comparable support exists within the adult community.

Parent Involvement

The single common link that presently exists between the school and adult environment for a student is the parent. Yet, in some cases, the parent is considered a barrier in the transition process (Benz & Halpern, 1987). At the other extreme, we tend to consider the parent having sole responsibility for transition activities. Both of these perceptions significantly undercut the potential of a parent in the transition process. It tends to overly simplify, to the detriment of the student, the responsibility for the movement of that individual between environments.

As Benz and Halpern (1987) noted, major changes have been implemented in philosophy and service delivery in education. The concept of transition presents yet another change. We as educators have the responsibility to involve parents in this change. This involvement is required in order to further enhance parental understanding and cooperation.

Educators of individuals with less severe disabilities may feel less need to become involved in the transition of their students. For those educators, the perception may be that the student or parent is solely responsible for transition. Transition initiatives have to be based on a recognition that educational outcome statistics tell us we are not accomplishing our goals. This

recognition brings us back to the role of the parent. Rather than the parent being the sole person responsible for transitioning, they should be a partner with education and adult services in the smooth movement of the student to adult environments.

Cooperative Efforts

Future joint agreements should set the stage for teachers to provide more systematic, community referenced experiences for a given student. Those experiences should help prepare that student for their transition to the adult environment. Through cooperative efforts, teachers should have support in those activities which meet the unique needs of students as they interface identified resources within the adult environment. This can only be achieved through cooperative efforts with those individuals within the adult community that can help reinforce efforts for a given student.

Rusch and Phelps (1985) summarized cooperative efforts in the following manner:

> "To be maximally effective, we assume that assessment, training and job placement activities that occur during this transition period be jointly planned, implemented and evaluated by special and vocational educators, guidance counselors, social workers, rehabilitation personnel, JTPA personnel, parents and advocates, and co-workers and supervisors from various businesses and industries within the community." (p. 490)

This summation indicates that cooperative efforts include internal cooperation between special and vocational educators, guidance counselors, and social workers, in addition to those individuals that represent the adult community.

Service Information

To provide a functional curriculum, one must have the information on those programs and services within the adult environment that your student may be able to utilize. Benz and Halpern (1987) in a study of secondary special education in the state of Oregon, reported that almost three-quarters of the teachers responding expressed the need for more knowledge of requirements of different work settings to increase the relevance of vocational training. Over half of those teachers also indicated a need for more information on referral processes. In Iowa we have recognized this need and it appears that we are working towards its solution.

At least three Iowa Area Education Agencies (AEA 9, AEA 10, AEA 11), have put together service resource manuals or service brochures for students, teachers and parents. Such information on services, available within a given region, can help in providing needed information on resources within the adult environment. These documents are available to teachers and parents through your Area Education Agency. A number of Area Education Agencies works the theme of transition into their Family/Educator Connection project through newsletters and other activities. These activities represent unique approaches to the problem of communicating information on, and enhancing understanding of, transition within the state of Iowa. A document entitled A Parent Handbook: Transition for School to Adult Life has been developed as a joint project of the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center and the Iowa Department of Education (Struck, 1988).

Another area of information need for educators is the area of "disincentives". In some cases, a student and parent may fear the loss of certain benefits (e.g., health insurance) through employment. These are real fears and can have a major impact on the decision to pursue competitive employment. A new publication from the Social Security Administration entitled Summary Guide to Social Security and Supplemental Social Security Income Work Incentives for Disabled and Blind, provides useable information on social security and supplemental social security income. This and similar types of information have to be made available to educators, parents and students.

Transition is in fact a complex concept. It encompasses many domains and brings to bear the knowledge and expertise of many actors for the benefit of a given student. Understanding the concept, both as an expert and a participant of an expanded team, should help one assume a role within transition. As an expert you will need to keep abreast of those activities within your state that are occurring through Iowa's Transition Planning Initiative. You will need to identify and communicate your transition needs. Only in that manner will Iowa's model for transition be able to support and reinforce your transition activities.

As a participant of an expanded team you will need to look at changes in your curriculum to facilitate the movement of your students to adult environments. This will include your understanding of, and cooperative working relationships with, adult service providers. It will require that you become knowledgeable of many aspects of your student's home community. Through cooperative efforts you should not be alone in those endeavors. Rather, you should have an expanded resource base to support your efforts.

The concept of transition is bringing about new roles for education. These roles are in fact manageable and achievable through cooperative efforts between the school and adult environments. Just as the concept of transition recognizes that neither educational nor adult environments can provide its programs in isolation, it also recognizes that your new role as an educator cannot be successful without cooperative efforts that span the educational and adult environments.

SUMMARY

The concept of transition of an individual with a disability from school to adult environments is presented from the perspective of what an educator may need to know on the subject. An approach to this complex issue is to perceive the educator's role as a) an expert on the transition needs of the student, and b) a participant of an expanded team for the student.

In fulfilling the role of expert, the educator must be able to identify and articulate those barriers to transition that would best be addressed on a state or regional level. The educator's role as an expert providing information to the Iowa Transition Initiative serves as a primary example.

The second, more direct, role for the educator is that of a participant of an expanded team. The expanded team concept is used to reinforce the role of parents and community representatives in the transition planning process. The areas of curriculum, parent involvement, cooperative efforts and service information, as they relate to the educator and transition, serve as primary components covered.

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